

Amendments to the Claims: This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A substrate, suitable for the preparation of a composite membrane, which substrate comprises a porous ~~matrix~~ non-woven sheet of fibres, ~~characterised in that wherein the fibres comprise mixed amorphous silica fibres a mixture of micro-fine amorphous silica fibres and one or more chopped strand(s) of amorphous silica that are and the fibres are~~ bound with a binder.
2. (Canceled)
3. (Canceled)
4. (Currently Amended) A substrate according to claim 1, wherein the ~~amorphous silica fibres comprise a mixture of both~~ comprises microfibrils and chopped fibres in the range of from 95:5% to 5:95% by weight of the mixture respectively.
5. (Currently Amended) A substrate according to claim 4, wherein the ~~amorphous silica fibres comprise a mixture of both~~ comprises microfibrils and chopped fibres in the range of from 70:30% to 30:70% by weight of the mixture respectively.
6. (Original) A substrate according to claim 1, wherein the fibres have a diameter in the range of from 0.1 μ m to 50 μ m.
7. (Original) A substrate according to claim 6, wherein the fibres have a diameter in the range of 0.4 μ m to 9 μ m.
8. (Original) A substrate according to claim 1, wherein the binder comprises a solution or dispersion of ion-exchange polymeric materials, non-ion-conducting polymers, or inorganic materials or mixtures thereof.
9. (Original) A substrate according to claim 1 for use in the preparation of a composite membrane.
10. (Currently Amended) A composite membrane comprising a porous substrate of fibres and at least one ion-conducting polymer, ~~characterised in that wherein the substrate comprises~~

a porous-matrix non-woven sheet of mixed amorphous silica fibres a mixture of micro-fine amorphous silica fibres and one or more chopped strand(s) of amorphous silica and the fibres are bound with a binder.

11. (Original) A composite membrane according to claim 10, which when dried then boiled in water undergoes less than or equal to about $\pm 9\%$ change in the area.
12. (Original) A composite membrane according to claim 10, wherein the total thickness of the membrane is less than 200 μm .
13. (Original) A composite membrane according to claim 10 for use in a fuel cell.
14. (Currently Amended) A process for the manufacture of a substrate, comprising the steps of
 - (a) dispersing ~~mixed amorphous silica fibres~~ a mixture of micro-fine amorphous silica fibres and one or more chopped strand(s) of amorphous silica in water to form a slurry;
 - (b) depositing the slurry onto a mesh bed to form a fibre network;
 - (c) drying and compacting the fibre network; and
 - (d) applying, before or after step (c), a dispersion of binder.
15. (Original) A process for the manufacture of a membrane, comprising the steps of
 - (i) forming a porous substrate according to claim 14; and thereafter,
 - (ii) impregnating the porous substrate with a polymeric material to produce a membrane.
16. (Original) A process according to claim 15, wherein step (ii) is carried out by nip roller coating of the substrate to fill it with a solution of ion-conducting polymeric material, and further compaction and drying of the membrane.
17. (Original) A membrane electrode assembly comprising a composite membrane according to claim 10.

18. (Original) A fuel cell comprising a composite membrane according to claim 10.
19. (Currently Amended) A process according to claim 15, wherein ~~mixed-amorphous-silica~~
the fibres are randomly oriented in said porous substrate.
20. (New) A substrate according to claim 1, wherein the fibres are randomly oriented.